



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Oblivious to the End – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. Richard Swenson

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Announcer: Today on Family Talk.

Roger Marsh: Well, you're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and this listener-supported radio ministry is a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. Today we are revisiting a classic interview Dr. Dobson conducted with Dr. Richard Swenson, author of the book, *Hurdling Toward Oblivion*. On yesterday's broadcast, Dr. Swenson explained his research and investigation into the logical and inevitable end to this temporary world. Despite that depressing thought, we as believers still have hope.

Dr. Swenson: God is up to something in our generational shift, and this isn't necessarily bad news. It's worrisome in a certain level, but you're right, despair is not appropriate. God is God. God is sovereign. God is powerful. He is informed. He is involved. He's a genius. So it turns out, the only hope that we have is the only hope that we've ever had.

Roger Marsh: Dr. Richard Swenson is a respected physician, researcher, author, and educator. He earned his bachelor's degree in physics and completed his MD from the University of Illinois School of Medicine. Dr. Swenson has a passion for examining the impact of faith and culture on our future. In just a moment, he'll be continuing his address of the dangerous combination of our fallen nature with the advancements in technology and weaponry, along with a proliferation of natural disasters and pandemics. He'll also remind us of the hope we have in God's sovereignty, grace, and love.

Roger Marsh: As we begin this broadcast, Dr. Swenson quickly recaps what we talked about on our last program.

Dr. Swenson: Basically the thesis, just to summarize again, is the idea that progress and technology and information are progressing very, very rapidly. The functional result of that is we always have more, more and more of everything faster and faster. If you do a curve of this, it is an exponential curve. That's a very dramatic curve that is first flat on the baseline and then goes straight up like a rocket

blast, if you can visualize that. I believe that this curve and this process of progress giving us more and more, which I call profusion, is an irreversible thing. Most people treat it as a good thing. We want more progress. We want more of all of these things.

Dr. Swenson: You have progress giving us more. It's irreversible. It's exponential in the way that it's developing, and that's very dramatic stuff. But you also have to factor in fallenness. A lot of futurists forget to factor in fallenness. With everything that's invented, with everything that appears on the world stage, there's a fallenness defect associated with it. There's either some potential flaw or actual flaw that is a monkey wrench in the system, something that causes our day not to flow right, problems that erupt all the time. That fallenness is familiar to Christians and even to non-Christians that things just don't go perfectly.

Dr. Swenson: That's Murphy's Law, I guess, applied to everything. Once you factor in fallenness and realize that progress is giving us more technology, more information, more weaponry, more communications, more mobility, more people, more money, because money is fueling a lot of this as well at exponential rates. You factor in fallenness to that, then that fallenness when you examine it has the ability now to exact more damage than it used to have. Now, the good still outdistances the bad. I completely agree with that, maybe 100 times, maybe 1000 times. We ought to be grateful for that, that the good of progress outdistances and outweighs the bad. But this fallenness and this little sub-parade that fallenness is assembling here is something we have to look at separately and account separately because once it's bad enough, it will exact major damage, cataclysmic damage on the world stage.

Dr. Dobson: All right. Let's talk about what you call the threshold of lethality in your book. Describe some of those possibilities that could lead to disaster.

Dr. Swenson: The threshold of lethality I think is one of the contributions that I make in this book to future studies that from anybody who reads this the light will turn on in their head if they're a futurist and they say, "That is true. We've got to take that seriously." Let's just look at cancer, for example. Cancer starts with one cell. You have 100 trillion cells in your body. One cell decides it's going to get a little weird and it keeps replicating faster and faster and pretty soon you've got a whole bunch of cells that are just in a subclinical state, and then they start developing some symptoms. You have some symptoms related to that. But as this cancer develops, it doesn't have to kill off all the organ systems of the body at the same time.

Dr. Swenson: For example, if it's in your liver all it has to do is choke off the functioning of the liver. You can have a great brain. You can have a great heart, great lungs. You can have great legs. You can have good kidneys, but you can't live without your liver. So the threshold of lethality is when fallenness reaches a certain line, which I define as the threshold of lethality, then that automatically trumps progress. I don't care how much progress you have. It makes no difference on how much you have. For example, when the World Trade Towers was bombed

years back, if they instead had used a nuclear weapon and the Pentagon all agrees that the time will come when nuclear weapons will be used, probably even within our borders.

Dr. Swenson: But if they had a suitcase with a nuclear weapon, it would have vaporized three square miles of Manhattan Island. Now, what is to stop that from happening down the road? Take it far enough out, take the technology far enough out. Give people more and more money. Osama bin Laden right now has control of, they say, a billion dollars. That can buy a lot of damage. The trim lines are all going in this direction, where fewer and fewer people have control of more and more technology, more and more computer power, more and more money and mobility, so they can do nefarious things. But it isn't just rogue people and rogue nations and individual players. There's other scientific trends, like nanotechnology, robotics, or genomics are three that have been talked about quite a bit recently in the news.

Dr. Swenson: We could go into those if you want to. I don't know how interested you are.

Dr. Dobson: Just very quickly give me the definition of those three.

Dr. Swenson: Robotics, for example, probably in the year 2020 robots will be smarter than humans for the first time. But they're gaining. Every year they make computing power that's faster and faster and more powerful. By the year 2020, they will equal the human brain. So there are serious scientists, I feel not Christians, but serious scientists who are talking about post-human species. When the robots get smarter than we are and more powerful than we are, the only way that we will be able to then survive is merging with robotic species. They're talking about post-human species. This is not any longer science fiction. This is stuff that serious people are looking at. They're looking at a utopian future that will start probably in 2030, 2040, 2050, where we will be doing this.

Dr. Swenson: We will then be able to evolve in amazing ways. Nanotechnology is another thing. Nanotechnology deals with individual atoms. A cell has a trillion atoms in it. A human cell has a trillion atoms in it. Cells manipulate molecules and then atoms. Well, nanotechnology built a little nanobot, a little, little, tiny robot, maybe about the size of a cell and it figures out how to take the carbon atoms and stack them next to each other. Now, if you can do that with carbon atoms, you can make windows out of diamonds. It'll cost you five cents. So people are excited about nanobots and nanotechnology, even in health applications. But the problem is you got a nanobot and you've taught it how to do this. You need more than one nanobot. You need lots of nanobots to put them to work on this.

Dr. Swenson: So you make nanobots self-replicating. This is precisely the problem related to this. Well, what if you don't build in a stop for their replication? By tomorrow noon, well, the entire globe will be knee-deep in nanobots. This is not our imagination. This is not fantasy. This is not science fiction. This is real stuff that scientists are thinking about. See, this isn't rogue terrorists that we're talking about, like the weapons of mass destruction perhaps would be. But this is

science that people are anxiously trying to make happen because if you could successfully come up with nanobots, you could make a trillion dollars for your company using nanobots. So there's a lot of gas being thrown on this fire.

Dr. Swenson: But it's worrisome if you take these implications out far enough and factor in falleness. We've got a lot coming down the road very quickly.

Dr. Dobson: What are some of the other threats to us?

Dr. Swenson: I've been at the Pentagon several times. I've in a national security seminar for a week. I know what they're thinking. They're worried about weapons of mass destruction in terms of nuclearization. They are worried about chemical weapons and about biological weapons, like anthrax and so on. Sooner or later, these things are indeed going to happen. It'll be very, very difficult for us to stop. There are 10 million people per day that cross international boundaries, and any bug known to humankind can jump inside a human host. That person could get on a plane and fly anywhere in the world during the incubation period of that disease.

Dr. Swenson: So infectious pandemics are a real concern. In 1918 there were 20 million people worldwide that died of influenza. We have something related to anthrax or Ebola or smallpox or even a very virulent strain of influenza. I don't want to stake my reputation or my sanity on any one of these. I'm just saying that the conditions today are different and they are ripe for these things exacting turmoil. I don't live in despair and I don't sit around and worry about these things. I do think deeply about them, but then I come back to the fact that God is God. God is God and He knows what's going on. Nothing takes Him by surprise. He's more powerful by infinity than any of these things that are threatening us. That's a good place to park your security, and I do that all the time. It helps me so much.

Dr. Dobson: It would appear that we are moving towards some kind of end point. You're looking at it coming from many different roads, but it all seems to lead in the direction that the scripture has told us, that things are going to change, that there is an age that will end. The things that you've said today and yesterday imply that we may not be very far away from it. You're not putting a timetable on it. But these things, you were talking about 2030 and 2050. Those are the lifetimes of our kids and our grandkids. Is that the direction you think we're going?

Dr. Swenson: Yes, and irreversibly. I do not know we, as a country, as a nation, as a world system, can avoid the consequences of the things that I've spelled out. I have thought about this for five or six years now. I've looked at it from every possible angle. I say, "Where's the loophole? Where's the escape hatch?" John Updike says, "What we need is progress with an escape hatch." He's about right on that. But there's no escape hatch that I can see, short of the sovereignty of God Himself, God Himself intervening and saying, "I'm not going to let this proceed in the direction it appears to be going."

Dr. Swenson: We need to be seriously looking at the science related to this and be sure to factor in exponentiality, but it also has a tremendous implication for the theology of us in our personal lives trusting God more, being more dependent, getting rid of our fear because God says, "Get rid of your fear. I am here. I am here and I am able. This is not a game. I'm real. I know all about your life. You need to put your hand in my hand and trust me. I will get you through this and we'll talk again on the other side. You'll find out that everything is all right."

Dr. Dobson: All right. Let's bring this way down from the theoretical level to the life of the person who's listening to us. We've got folks out there who are worried about how in the world they're going to meet their next mortgage payment and how they're going to get the kids to school tomorrow morning. These medical tests that are coming back, they're very concrete anxieties in people's lives. And yet here we are today talking about these macro issues that could end the world. How does a person cope with all that?

Dr. Swenson: Several things. First of all, I would say that understanding is its own reward. We can stick our head in the sand about these issues. That isn't going to make them go away. These things have to be confronted. But I do have a message for individuals. I dedicated this book to our two boys. Linda and I together dedicate ... Could I just read that?

Dr. Dobson: Please.

Dr. Swenson: It's two sentences. This sounds like such a strange thing to do. Our two sons are Adam and Matt. I say, "Your generation will surely witness interesting days. My advice, don't quit, just live ready. Conduct your studies with diligence, your work with perseverance, your relationships with grace. Seek authenticity at the highest level for one of the great gifts of authenticity is that it leaves us continuously ready for what comes next."

Dr. Swenson: What I would tell people to do in their personal life is to live ready. Somebody once said, "We should plan as if God's coming back in 100 years, but we should live as if Christ is coming back today." I think that's a very good balance to strike, a very good balance. If death came and knocked at our door and said, "Come with me," a lot of us would say to death, "Give me a month to get ready. Would you just give me a month to get ready?" I would say, "Get ready for what?" Why do we need a month to get ready, to start living consistent with our beliefs, to start putting our priorities into place?

Dr. Swenson: If that's what we need a month to get ready, why don't we just live ready? Why don't we have authenticity at the highest level in all areas of life, in our values, in our vision, in our lifestyle, in our relationships, so that if Christ came back today we're ready? One of my definitions of authenticity is that when we die and go to the other side, the difference between our life and our testimony is so small that God doesn't have to change hardly anything. That is my agenda for the church and for the people of God and for families. Start doing in a serious, radical way what the scriptures have called us to do.

- Dr. Swenson: Start loving people as if you meant it. Start living for God. Start loving your neighbor. Start spreading the good news, a message of reconciliation. It talks about patience and kindness and lowliness and gentleness and meekness and all of the fruits of the spirit. We can put those into our lives right now and have a tremendous effect on a needy world who's chaotic, who's casting about. We have a place to stand that God has given us that's unmovable and unshakable. He's given ministries to us that are simply unprecedented. He said, "I'll hold your hand. I am here. This is not a game. I'm real. I'm right behind you. Believe me."
- Dr. Swenson: The scriptures through and through talks about that sovereignty and power and intimacy of God. Start time to live as if we actually believed it and then do the ministry that God has placed before us and leave the timing to God.
- Dr. Dobson: He's told us not to hold too tightly to the things of this world. It's going to be torn loose from our hands one way or the other. Whether or not the world spins out of control in our lifetime or whether we simply go on to be with the Lord, the result is the same. This world is not our home. We're just passing through. There used to be an old Stamps Quartet song that made that case. In fact, many of the hymns of the church in the past talked about the future, talked about heaven. When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing this will be. Now we talk more about linking into the power of God for more successful living here, prosperity and promise and health and so on.
- Dr. Dobson: But the scriptures all point toward the future. We really need to hold lightly the things that seem so concrete today because they really aren't.
- Dr. Swenson: I think in many ways this is a test pattern. In many ways, I think I'm doing all these projects for God and then maybe I'm the project. Maybe God is working on me. Maybe the Holy Spirit is just testing me to say, "Dick, I want to conform you to the image of Christ." I'm worried about does the dog have enough food? Is there macaroni? Is the potato well-done? Has the oil been changed? Those are all important things in a certain context, but there's a larger agenda. There's a critical nature to this agenda. There are people to be loved. There's a message to share to the world.
- Dr. Swenson: God has given us these kinds of ministries and He says, "Maybe the time is short. I'm not going to let you know exactly, but maybe the time is short. There's the fig tree. Maybe the time is short. Why don't you get about my business?" We know that the Holy Spirit of God is building the kingdom of God today, right as we're sitting here on our generational shift, very rapidly. Intentional Christianity is growing at a rate three and a half times that of global population growth. There are places in the world where people are flocking into the kingdom of God. So God's already at work. We just need to join him in that work and cooperate with the work that God is doing.
- Dr. Swenson: Set aside some of the stresses and overload and trivialities of our day-to-day and just start doing what Christ has beckoned us to do all along.

Dr. Dobson: Let me get you to say it again. You talk about a lot of catastrophic circumstances in this book, but you're not fearful for the future.

Dr. Swenson: For one reason, because God is God. I do not have to deny any kind of trauma that is in front of me. The refiner's fire is sometimes biblical, but God will always redeem it. You have to put your hand in God. Don't con God about whose side you're on. I mean we sort of want to be good Christians, but we want to have a foot in this world too. But those two worlds are diverging and we're going to get a serious groin pull if we don't make up our mind about citizenship. This agenda that I'm talking about, this scenario that I'm painting, which I think is true. I would be very surprised if 100 years from now this is not unfolded exactly the way that I'm explaining it now. But I do not regard that as a threat. It's a wake-up call to the church to be authentic at the highest level.

Dr. Dobson: As you think ahead to the coming days and months, what kind of thoughts do you have? You don't know whether or not some of this may occur in the next year or two. When you contemplate these things, how do you pray? What is your attitude toward the immediate future?

Dr. Swenson: Several things, one, I just am grateful to God for the privilege of living today. That might sound strange given the topic that we've covered. God's not a random God. It's not a cosmic accident that you and I are sitting here and alive today. I mean He picked me. He picked you. He picked everybody who's listening to be alive today. He's given us a ministry, a specific ministry to do, and He has faith in our ability to do that ministry. I say, "Thank you, God, for putting me on a stage at this very, very interesting time, giving me this ministry of hopefully speaking encouragement and hope to individual people and explaining to them the bigger picture, the picture that includes God and things that are possible and positive and the common good and bigger myself, that I can give myself to."

Dr. Swenson: S. J. Perelman once said, "I don't know where we're going or how we'll get there, but when we get there, we'll be there and that something even is nothing." Well, this should be the motto of the church. We know where we're going and why we're going and God's left a record for us. So I'm grateful to God. Number two, I would say God, "Make me faithful." If the world system turns up the pressure in my life, am I going to bail? I don't want to. I don't know completely the answer to that question but, boy, I want to be faithful all the way to the end. The third thing that I would say is, "God, make my life say love."

Dr. Swenson: I hesitate to even use that word because it's been so cheapened in our society, but I believe that's the word. That is the word of eternity and everything has to go through that door. Whether it's my writing or whether it's my relationships, whether it's my interactions with strangers or whatever I do, it has to say love because God Himself is love, because without love we are nothing. It's the greatest commandment, all the commandments wrapped up in this, to love. If people had to focus on one thing that they should do, they should love. Love wins even when it dies.

Dr. Dobson: It sure does.

Dr. Swenson: If evil comes through the door and kills love, God adjudicates. God stands in the sidelines and He looks down and He says, "You win." Love laying on the floor. He has that kind of power. We just have to do it right. He's explained it for over 2000 years and we need to be serious about radical authenticity.

Dr. Dobson: What this discussion today and last time emphasizes for me is the return of Christ. I can't wait for Him to come. There was a time when I was younger that I had a lot of things I wanted to do. I was enjoying what I'm doing, I still am. But the older I get, the more excited I am about that moment when He returns.

Dr. Swenson: Amen.

Dr. Dobson: I mean if there were a red button here and I could hit it and bring Him back, I would jump for it. I believe He's coming. I believe His return is imminent. I'm not going to select a date again because people have gotten in trouble with that. But we can see the fig tree. We're the generation of the fig tree, I believe. We can see that the time is ripe and I can't wait for His return.

Dr. Swenson: It's biblical to look forward to it.

Dr. Dobson: Sure it is.

Dr. Swenson: We're supposed to be looking for it. The whole greeting of Maranatha talks about that, as a matter of fact. I live under the weight of fallenness. I feel that every single day when I get out of bed. I feel the weight of fallenness. This doesn't mean that I'm a joyless person at all. I enjoy life and I enjoy relationship. I enjoy laughing and I enjoy lots of things, but I feel the weight of fallenness. It'll be so wonderful when God comes and sets things right. Can you imagine what it would be like to get out of bed and not have fallenness in the world to deal with any more? I mean who wouldn't be looking forward to a condition that's going to look like that?

Dr. Dobson: Perfect bodies. As a physician, you can appreciate that.

Dr. Swenson: I've done a book recently on sovereignty of God and He's going to rewrite the rules of physics. He's going to allow different dimensions maybe of space and time. What does God have prepared for us? It's just things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond our very imagining, what God has in store for those who love Him. This is just a vapor. This is just a vapor. It's just a breath, scripture says. We just have to hang on, do it right, for a vapor's length of time, then we're home for eternity. We can celebrate. They'll be so much to celebrate.

Dr. Dobson: It's amazing that a discussion about hurtling toward oblivion could be so positive. And yet, the scriptures call it a mystery, that we should be of good

cheer in the midst of tribulation. That's the message of scripture. That's what you're trying to say here.

Dr. Swenson: John 16:33, Jesus says, "These things I've spoken unto you so that in me you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer." He said it right there.

Dr. Dobson: He did.

Dr. Swenson: "in the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer for I have overcome the world." That message is as real today. Just because He said it 2000 years ago, it doesn't mean He didn't say it to me and to you. We need to take our security from that.

Dr. Dobson: The book is published by NavPress, *Hurtling Toward Oblivion, A Logical Argument For the End of the Age*. Dr. Richard Swenson, thank you for being our guest again.

Dr. Swenson: Thank you so much.

Roger Marsh: I'm Roger Marsh with you once again. What an encouraging end to this edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We can absolutely put our faith and trust in our never-changing God. He truly is our only source of security in these turbulent and divisive times. Visit today's broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org for more information about Dr. Richard Swenson. There you can learn more about his research and his book called *Hurtling Toward Oblivion*. Go now to drjamesdobson.org and click on the broadcast tab at the top of the page.

Roger Marsh: We'd also love to hear your thoughts on these insightful programs. You can share your feedback with us by visiting Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk on Facebook and comment on today's broadcast post. We really enjoy hearing how our daily radio broadcasts are impacting you and your family. Go now to [Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com) and search for Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Once you're there, be sure to like the page and then be sure to leave your comments and thoughts on today's broadcast post as well. We look forward to hearing from you.

Roger Marsh: Well, that's all the time we have for today. Be sure to listen in again tomorrow as Dr. Tim Clinton will be sharing his recent interview with Patti Garibay from American Heritage Girls. They'll identify the many negative influences on culture, on a girl's self esteem and worth and character. Dr. Clinton and Mrs. Garibay will also discuss how American Heritage Girls are encouraging young women to be godly and virtuous. Don't miss that conversation next time, right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Roger Marsh: I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. Dobson: This is James Dobson again. As we close today's program I just want to thank so many of you out there who make this broadcast possible with your contributions. I want to tell you how much your generosity is appreciated.